

Proposed FY 2016 Region 10 OECA Enforcement Initiative Project: **Goals and Objectives**

Buckhorn Mountain Mine and Kettle River Tailings Facility Superfund Assessment and Financial Assurance Cost Estimation

Buckhorn Mountain Mine is an underground gold mining operation in Northeastern Washington State. The operation is owned and operated by Kinross, which trucks the ore to a milling operation 76 kilometers away in Kettle River, where a tailings facility is located. Kettle River has been in operation since 1989 receiving ores from a variety of mines in the area and Canada - and maintains a wet TSF with a capacity for 4.7 million tons of tailings and a dam height of 200ft. EPA Region 10 is still gathering information with respect to current volumes, water treatment and closure plans for both the mine and the Kettle River tailings facility.

In 2012 Kinross was cited for water quality violations by the Washington State Department of Ecology resulting from an inability to manage water (resulting in impacts to groundwater and landslides) at the site which has impacted water in a nearby creek – the details of which are provided in the following link: <http://www.ecy.wa.gov/news/2012/240.html>.

The Kettle River tailings facility (<http://www.kinross.com/operations/operation-kettle-river-buckhorn-usa.aspx>) is one of the few wet tailings facilities in Region 10, and EPA has added the site to its list of operations with similarities to the Mt. Polley Site in Central BC which experienced a tailings dam failure in August 2014. The Region has concerns about the potential for future releases from this site, and the adequacy of financial assurance to deal with long term water treatment and dam maintenance.

The Region will work closely with Ecology over the next several months to determine appropriate next steps with respect to both of these sites, but recommends the following goals and objectives for the project:

- Develop an EPA independent financial assurance cost estimate for both facilities in order to facilitate Ecology efforts to secure the appropriate bonds.
- Determine the nature and extent of past releases from the Buckhorn Mountain Mine (potential for CERCLA removal or remedial action).
- Examine the adequacy of efforts to control water at the Buckhorn site since the 2011/12 releases and landslides.
- Gain a detailed overview of the Kettle River Tailings facility by performing a CERCLA SI to determine if action is required, and the potential for future releases from the facility. Incorporate Mt. Polley recommendations into the analysis.
- Determine the the long-term O and M obligations for both sites, including long-term water management and treatment.

The deliverables for this effort will include a formal CERCLA Site Inspection document, including sections on data gaps and potential release scenarios; and an independent EPA Financial Assurance cost estimate for both facilities. Through this work, and these deliverables, EPA will be able to assist Ecology in obtaining appropriate FA, and taking steps toward addressing concerns proposed by a Mt. Polley-type tailings facility in the U.S. A portion of the HQ funding should be placed in the R10 START contract to

perform the SI, and a portion in the SKEO contract for FA cost estimation. Completion of these deliverables is expected by mid-summer, 2016.